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ABSTRACT

A number of problems encountered by a large number of entering college freshmen at Kingsborough Community College under Open Admissions, such as serious deficiencies in English comprehension and express skills, deficiencies in mathematics, basic study skills, uncertainty with regard to academic expectations, and a general lack of sophistication in understanding college procedures and requirements, are listed. A two-pronged attack to combat these problems, including a placement committee to control the academic program and workload of all incoming freshmen, and an intensive orientation and the academic program and workload of all incoming freshmen, and an intensive orientation and academic counseling system, is described. The orientation and pre-registration goals are considered to have been achieved by means of a program to which entering freshmen are invited at the end of the previous semester in groups of about one hundred. Following a general introduction and orientation to the college, counselors proceed to counsel and pre-register students in groups of ten, with the technical assistance of a student aide. To serve the number of students who remained perplexed after the large scale orientation and pre-registration, an individual approach consisting of informal briefing and question and answer periods is suggested. Results of a pilot survey sampling students' reaction to this approach suggest that it successfully accomplished its objectives. (Author/AM)

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INTEGRATING THE ILL-PREPARED FRESHMAN INTO COLLEGE:

A PILOT PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This article describes some problems of entering college freshmen under "Open Admissions", and a modality devised by Kingsborough Community College for dealing with these problems, including an individualized approach. Results of a pilot survey sampling students' reaction to this approach suggest that it successfully accomplished its objectives.

INTEGRATING THE ILL-PREPARED FRESHMAN INTO COLLEGE: A PILOT PROJECT

Entering Freshmen have always been known as a specific breed to be singled out for some special consideration. It has generally been recognized that the transition from high school to college requires some form of adjustment on the part of the average student and Student Personnel Services of many institutions of higher education have made some provisions to ease that adjustment. With the advent of "Open Admissions", the problems of entering freshmen have become more severe and much more obvious. The severity of the situation is reflected not only quantitatively, by the number of students requiring special attention, but also by its qualitative dimensions. The concern with this problem is also reflected in the professional literature, which since 1970 alone, includes numerous articles describing and evaluating a variety of freshmen orientation approaches and modalities (see references).

Special Needs of the Entering "Open Admissions" Freshman

The academically less successful high school graduate represented by the "Open Admissions" student has been found to be in need of special counseling input to orient him to the academic rigors of college, and of remedial programs to alleviate deficiencies in basic skills. Following the institution of "Open Admissions" at the City University of New York during the 1970-71 school season, much publicity in the news media centered around the large attrition figures for that year's enrollees. Considering the unmet needs of that type of student, the large attrition figures should not have come as a surprise. It took a number of semesters for most of the units of the City

University to come to grips with the problem of integrating the new type of incoming student into the academic milieu of higher education; some are still grappling to meet the challenge. Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York takes pride in having met this challenge since the Fall of 1971 with increasing success.

Upon analysis of the first freshmen classes entering Kingsborough Community College after "Open Admissions", the following problems confronting large numbers of students became apparent:

a) serious deficiencies in English comprehension and expression skills

b) deficiencies in fundamental mathematical skills

c) deficiencies in basic study skills

d) lack of sophistication in understanding college procedures and requirements

e) lack of acquaintance with college terminology

f) unfamiliarity with content of college subjects

g) ambiguity concerning goal orientation

h) uncertainty with regard to academic expectations

Kingsborough's Remedy

To remedy the problems just outlined, a two-pronged attack was launched by the college administration. 1) A Placement Committee, under the leadership of an "Associate Dean for Open Admissions", was established and given the task of carefully controlling the academic

program and work-load of all incoming freshmen. On the basis of the results of placement tests in English and Mathematics, as well as a review of high school records, this committee limits the choice of subjects and number of credits for each incoming student found deficient, in accordance with his deficiency. At the same time, remedial instruction in English and Mathematics is assigned, as required.

2) An intensive orientation and academic counseling system was set up, under the leadership of the Dean of Students and special coordinators, for the purposes of orienting students to college procedures and requirements, presenting them with the first-semester program options and limitations designed by the Placement Committee, guiding them in the selection of courses during the pre-registration process, and counseling them academically on an ongoing caseload basis from semester to semester.

The above-mentioned orientation and pre-registration goals have been achieved during the past few semesters by means of a program to which entering freshmen are invited at the end of the previous semester in groups of about one hundred. Following a general introduction and orientation to the college, counselors proceed to counsel and pre-register students in groups of ten, with the technical assistance of a student aide.

Though the combined "Orientation and Pre-Registration" program has served successfully in introducing incoming freshmen to college procedures and to their college program, it had been the feeling of many counselors that a considerable number of students still commenced their first semester with a degree of confusion. The large-scale centralized "Orientation and Pre-Registration" program succeeded, indeed, in producing a more knowledgeable and less bewildered incoming student. The plethora of information transmitted to students at one time, however, left questions unanswered.

Furthermore, a substantial number of students remained perplexed concerning the rationale and implications of receiving a first semester program limited to specific subjects and to number of contact hours.

An Individual Approach to Freshmen Orientation

To remedy this situation, a Student Services committee concerned with the process of freshmen orientation suggested that a number of counselors volunteer to invite incoming freshmen to their office in small groups, on an experimental basis, for an informal briefing and question-and-answer period prior to the "Orientation and Pre-Registration" program. This suggestion was enthusiastically and unanimously endorsed by all counselors who volunteered to share the entire load of Spring '74 incoming freshmen for the purpose of conducting small-group briefing sessions. Each freshman received a letter, carrying the signature of the assigned counselor, inviting him to call for an appointment during the week to ten-day period prior to the "Orientation and Pre-Registration" program date. To the pleasant surprise of many counselors, more than 80% of the students invited chose to attend these voluntary briefing sessions, which in the opinion of all counselors, turned out to be quite gratifying. Among the topics covered during these sessions were explanations concerning the placement procedures, descriptions of remedial classes, options for changes of program, the pre-registration and registration procedures, degree requirements and objectives, attendance and grading procedures, available counseling and supportive services, and definitions of college terms such as "matriculation", "pre-requisite", "credit", "contact hour" and "cumulative index".

A Pilot Project

This writer was curious, however, to ascertain whether the students involved, like the counselors, viewed this experience as a generally useful and pleasant one, and to what extent it clarified, in the minds of the students, some of the usual items of confusion. The Survey Form below was, therefore, devised one day prior to Pre-Registration to get a sampling of student feelings concerning the small briefing sessions.

SURVEY FORM

1) Did you come to see a counselor in response to the invitation prior to today's pre-registration program? ____

2) If not, do not answer anymore questions, but state briefly why not? _____

3) If yes, did you find the meeting useful? ____

4) Did it help introduce you to the college rules and regulations? ____

5) Did it help you understand what courses you might be taking during the first semester? ____

6) Did it clarify for you a little of what you might expect when you come to register to select your schedule? ____

7) Did you consider the meeting a pleasant experience? ____

8) Did you have the opportunity to get your questions about the college answered? ____

9) Have you any suggestions for what might be done during such programs in the future? Please state. _____

The form was available in time for its use during the "Liberal Arts Orientation and Pre-Registration Program" and was completed by 104 students. Though the survey is obviously viewed only as a pilot project, the results are highly suggestive of a measure of success with regard to the program surveyed. They are outlined in Tables 1-3.

Results

As can be seen from Table 1, of the 104 students responding, 86 or 83 % indicated that they attended the counseling session. The percentage of attendance obtained from this sample corresponds closely with the actual percentage reported seen by the counselors at the conclusion of the program. Considering that the students were invited to the campus twice within a two-week period, and some of the reasons for non-attendance indicated below, the response can rightfully be assumed as extremely gratifying.

Table 2 focuses upon the reason given by students for not attending the special program. As can be seen, two-thirds of the students in this group stated valid and foreseeable reasons for having missed the program. Only one-third of this group chose not to express any reason for their absence. Since the entire "non-attending" group constituted only 17% of the students surveyed, these results are further suggestive of the positive manner with which this program was received.

Table 3 tabulates the responses to items 3-8 on the Survey Form, which solicit yes or no responses concerning the usefulness of the program.

As can be seen from the first entry of the table, 63 of the 86 respondents who attended the program (73%), responded positively to all 6 items on the Survey Form, indicating that they found the counseling session pleasant as well as useful and informative in every respect. The response to the various individual items was also highly positive, ranging from an 85% positive response to items 4 and 6, to a 94% positive response to item 8. As indicated in the second column of this table, a few students qualified their positive responses to individual items by the addition of the word "some" or "somewhat". These responses, though qualified, may also be considered in a positive light. The low percentages of negative responses ranged from 5% to item 7, to 13% to item 6. A very small number of respondents did not respond at all to specific individual items, as can be seen in the last column of the table.

Conclusions

Although this pilot project was limited in scope, and to a relatively small sample of incoming students, the results strongly suggest that the experimental program of small group counseling sessions prior to the general orientation and pre-registration of Incoming Freshmen was very well received by the students involved. This was mainfested not only by the very large attendance at these "voluntary" sessions, and the positive reactions reported by the counselors, but also by the high percentage of positive responses to the items on the Survey Form. The fact that 92% or more of the respondents felt that their counseling session was useful and pleasant, that it helped them understand the nature and limitations of their first semester program, and that it gave them the opportunity to get their questions about the college answered, indicates that the primary

objectives of the program were fulfilled. The relatively smaller percentage of positive response (85%) to items 4 and 6 can most likely be attributed to the fact that not all counselors placed equal emphasis on these items. A spot-check among counselors tends to verify this assumption.

The open-ended solicitation of suggestions in item 9 of the Survey Form produced only one relevant response, suggesting individual "private conferences" rather than group sessions. In view of the large number of incoming students processed each semester, this suggestion is obviously quite impractical. It should be pointed out, however, that where individual prospective students contacted a counselor prior to admission to request a private conference, it had always been the general practice of counselors to grant such request.

In conclusion, it should be noted that some counselors included a brief tour of the campus as part of the group counseling session. Since a large number of the students were not exposed to this experience, this aspect of the program did not appear on the Survey Form. The counselors involved, however, reported positive reactions on the part of students to this informal experience and suggested that it be expanded during future semesters. This is, indeed, the current intention of Kingsborough's Department of Student Services and will be implemented in future semesters under the auspices of a recently organized peer-advisor program.

TABLE 1

ATTENDANCE AT COUNSELING SESSIONS

	NUMBER	PERCENT*
ATTENDED	86	83
DID NOT ATTEND	18	17
TOTAL	104	100

TABLE 2

STATED REASONS FOR NOT HAVING ATTENDED COUNSELING SESSION

REASON	NUMBER	PERCENT*
DID NOT RECEIVE INVITATION	4	22
WORKING AT THAT TIME	2	11
ILL ON THAT DAY	2	11
OUT-OF-TOWN THAT DAY	1	6
LACKING CARFARE	1	6
CONFUSED WITH PRE-REGISTRATION INVITATION	2	11
NO REASON STATED	6	33
TOTAL	18	200

TABLE 3

QUALITY OF RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC ITEMS ON SURVEY FORM

ITEMS	POSITIVE		QUALIFIED		NEGATIVE		NO RESPONSE	
	NO.	%*	NO.	%*	NO.	%*	NO.	%*
POSITIVE RESPONSE TO ALL ITEMS	63	73	--	--	--	--	--	--
ITEM 3	79	92	2	2	5	6	0	0
ITEM 4	73	85	1	1	10	12	2	2
ITEM 5	79	92	2	2	5	6	0	0
ITEM 6	73	85	1	1	11	13	1	1
ITEM 7	80	93	1	1	4	5	1	1
ITEM 8	81	94	0	0	5	6	0	0

* ALL PER CENT ENTRIES ARE COMPUTED TO THE NEAREST INTEGER

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